Foreword

One way in which I make a personal judgment of a manuscript’s worthiness is by the number of margin notes I make. Judging from the amount of ink I went through when reading the manuscript for this book, the text is worthy indeed. As both a researcher and practitioner of online teaching, I found many interesting and provocative insights in Dr. Gudea’s book. My copy of the manuscript is littered with margin notes such as “Interesting!” “Research idea?” and the like.

Regardless of the context, effective teaching requires both motivated teachers and motivated learners; one without the other borders on the useless. Despite the considerable, growing interest in online education, there are few in-depth studies of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of online teaching. This book is a refreshing exception. Through his ambitious research project, Dr. Gudea provides those interested in online teaching with two significant gifts. First, he offers a comprehensive, well-supported theory of online teaching. Such a theory is a clear contribution to researchers interested in this area by providing a ready means for developing testable hypotheses. Second, the insights offered throughout the text hold significant value for teachers and administrators. Teachers and administrators interested in online learning can use this text as a handbook full of valuable insights. The author carefully crafted the book so the reader can “skip around,” reading chapters of particular interest in whatever order strikes one’s fancy.

In addition to the focus on teachers’ perceptions and attitudes, several other features set this book apart. First, it is based on extensive and rigorous research. Dr. Gudea followed a well-established, rigorous methodology while conducting his research. (In fact, this book can serve as a roadmap for others interested in qualitative research.) He interviewed literally dozens of educators engaged in online teaching, yielding a rich set of data, which he analyzes using well-established methods. Throughout the book he also compares his findings to previous research, pointing out areas of
agreement and divergence. This technique has the dual benefit of solidifying earlier research and pointing out areas that need further investigation.

Second, Dr. Gudea took pains to interview a wide variety of online teachers. This yields a great diversity of opinions, which I found quite fascinating. Of particular interest is his inclusion of part-time, adjunct faculty. These individuals, who may teach for multiple universities, make up an increasing portion of college faculty. However, few researchers bother to tap this resource. Part-time faculty face a number of unique challenges and pressures; by interviewing these individuals, Dr. Gudea is able to bring many of these challenges to light.

Another feature of the text that I found particularly useful is the inclusion of a great many direct quotes, which adds considerable value. Including these quotes enables readers to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers’ thoughts. In addition, the quotes allow readers to draw their own conclusions, rather than solely relying on the author’s interpretation. Many of these quotes make for fascinating reading and provide interesting glances into the minds of the instructors.

Like it or not, online teaching and learning is here to stay. According to the Sloan Consortium, over 2.5 million people are currently taking online courses, and over 100,000 teachers are involved in online teaching. These numbers are only going to increase. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers, researchers and administrators understand what it takes to effectively deliver and manage online learning. Dr. Gudea’s timely and insightful text goes a long way towards helping build this understanding. Anyone interested in the teaching side of online education is well advised to read this book; it is an investment that will be rewarded many times over.

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Craig Van Slyke is an associate professor of management information systems and chair of the Decision Science/Management Information Systems department at Saint Louis University. Prior to joining SLU, he was on the faculties of University of Central Florida and Ohio University. He teaches a variety of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. He holds a PhD in information systems from the University of South Florida. Dr. Van Slyke also spent many years in the information technology industry in a number of capacities. His current research interests focus on issues related to the adoption of information and communication technologies. Dr. Van Slyke has published in a number of journals, including Information Resource Management Journal, Communications of the ACM, Journal of the AIS, European Journal of Information Systems, Decision Sciences, and Database for Advances in Information Systems, among other journals. He serves on the editorial board of Information Resource Management Journal and the Journal of Information Systems Education. In addition, he has coauthored three information systems textbooks. Dr. Van Slyke holds leadership positions in AIS SIG:ED and the Southern Association for Information Systems.